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SOCIALIZING OUTSIDE READING

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"But that won't do. It's not an outdoor book," a visitor heard one pupil say to another at the end of a recitation. That was the way the system worked. The outside or parallel reading was placed in charge of a secretary for the class. She copied the roll in a little memorandum book. She also knew the general requirement for the book of that month. At the time, the class was reading *Travels with a Donkey*, and was accordingly requested to find some interesting outdoor book, such as those by Thompson-Seton, the *Jungle Book*, *The Call of the Wild*. The girl was herself well read for her age, but she frequently found it necessary to refer cases to the teacher for decision. She was gradually led, however, to rely more and more confidently on her own judgment, and to seek counsel of older heads only when she felt quite unqualified to render a decision herself. Furthermore, she made up programs for the successive meetings of the class. The teacher allowed her ten minutes two or three times a week for the reports on the reading. She made an effort to have every member of the class appear before his classmates at least once during the term. She saw to it that those who did not deliver the oral report handed in a written review. Lastly, she presided over the class during the ten minutes while her program was the order of the day. She was instructed that for the time being she was the teacher and that she should handle the class as she saw fit.

On analysis it develops that the main feature of the period allotted to this work is the review of the book itself. The pupils are instructed that the entire report must not consume over five minutes. To insure observance of this limit a timekeeper is appointed to announce the expiration of the fourth minute and of the fifth. At first there is not very much necessity for this austere and incorruptible official, but later he has to call down nearly every

speaker, so engrossed and fluent do the reporters become. The report is made up of parts. An almost invariable feature is the summary of the story or explanation, or of enough of it to arouse interest in the book. There are several values here. If the whole story is given, there is a very beneficial training in discrimination and grouping of essentials. To retell in two or three minutes the ground plan of *The Call of the Wild* is not possible offhand. As most of the pupils have two or three weeks in which to prepare, they have time in which to weigh the relative importance of incidents and details. But at other times the pupil finds it advisable to tell only enough to initiate one into the mystery or to inveigle one into the charm of the book. Here the effort is for vividness rather than compression. The test is of the vocabulary at the student's command and his sense of plot structure or of narrative and descriptive effect. These summaries or introductions also give excellent training in speaking. There is an incentive to talk so distinctly that everyone in the room can hear every word, and so connectedly that no one will fail to understand. There soon arises a distinct effort to be interesting to one's classmates.

A second feature of the report is the reading of a selection which shall in some way be typical of the book or the author. The pupil's appreciation is thus validly tested. He gives a reason for singling out this passage, and after completing the oral rendering he stands ready to defend the selection. The motive for making the choice thereby becomes strong enough to enlist real effort from the boy or girl. Of equal value is the actual reading before the other pupils. Mere saying over of the words is soon discovered to result in indifference and inattention. No matter how faithful the teacher may have been in attempts to secure expression in oral rendering of literature, the necessity for it can seldom be brought home half so effectively as by these voluntary readings before the class.

The third feature of the report varies. Sometimes the pupil will be interested in the author. Boys and girls of the second year who read *An Inland Voyage* can in many cases compare Burroughs or Roberts as outdoor authors with Stevenson, showing what each is interested in and how their descriptions vary. Once in a

while you will find an especially intelligent boy who can compare the life of some other author, say Parkman, with the man whose book has been studied in class. Oftener the pupil will confine himself to the book itself. He may like it because of its adventure, or its humor, or the novelty of its scenes, or the lifelikeness of the characters. Whatever the type of book, he tries to make the class feel its quality by a comparison with some production presumably familiar to the class, as *Treasure Island* or *Huckleberry Finn* or *Ivanhoe*. With some pupils character makes a clear appeal. Odysseus turns up again and again in conjunction with such diverse personages as Tom Sawyer and Lobo the Wolf. The scene in which Tom has the fence whitewashed somewhat fancifully brings to mind the guile of Odysseus in gaining entrance to his own home in the rags of a beggar. Once there was so surprising a collocation as Emma McChesney and Shylock! Amusing as some of these combinations are, there is often valuable individual insight displayed, and nearly always discussion which makes clearer the student's conception of familiar characters. With other pupils the incidents make a strong appeal. The fight in the roundhouse in *Kidnapped* is compared with the storming of Torquilstone, or the trial in *James Balfour* with the trial of Rebecca at Tempelstowe. With the more mature students the ideas in the books often make an appeal. *The Melting Pot* once led to a discussion of whether Jew or Gentile were the more open-minded. Some boys find in *How the Other Half Lives* an argument for or against immigration, and girls have discovered in *The Promised Land* a new definition of "American."

One additional feature of the report is the appointment of special critics for the different phases. One deals with the content of the reports. He points out the interest in the new information, and the new ideas contributed by the reviewer. Another comments on the diction and idiom and arrangement of the review, pointing out mistakes or obscurities or commending excellencies. Another will dwell upon aspects of the delivery, such as slouching posture, mispronunciations, failure to speak distinctly or with enough variety of modulation and expression, and similar shortcomings. The class thereby comes to erect standards of effective-

ness in oral composition, which they will consider the more valid as they, under hidden guidance, develop them from recitation to recitation.

The stimulating nature of the class-hour is evident from the sequel to the reviews. Almost invariably, as soon as the scheme has been put into smooth working order, members of the class request of the secretary, who is serving as teacher pro tempore, permission to ask questions of the reporter. The questions are frequently searching. "Will you explain how the passage is typical of the book?" "Do you think the book would be interesting to most pupils in our term?" "Do you think the hero acted right in such and such a situation?" Often, too, there are disagreements with the reviewer. One girl thought *The Master's Violin* was a fine book because it was so true to life! Immediately another girl, merely on the basis of the summary and the passage read to the class, took issue with her and secured the vote of the class in her favor. All of which shows that even such a slip as having Myrtle Reed in a class report is not without its compensations.

There is, besides, a salutary effect on the voluntary reading of the students. Books reported on in class arouse genuine inquiries out of class hours. They will be read by several other students in the course of the following month. In fact, the more intelligent members of the group thereby form a little reading circle. One girl became so much interested that she began a brief record of her reading, wherein she placed for each book the title, the author, and a few sentences giving her impressions.

The larger value has surely not escaped the reader who has come thus far through the experiment. The boys and girls develop ability to manage their own affairs, and a sense of responsibility. When the teacher is late in appearing in class he finds that the roll has been taken, the secretary for reading has assumed the chair, and the reports have begun with no loss of time. The pupils gain confidence and skill in addressing and holding the attention of their classmates. School does not seem the cut and dried program that it sometimes has to become in drill work. In fine, to a gratifying extent these minutes devoted to reports of outside reading develop both spontaneity and originality.